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ABSTRACT

Students (n=358) completing the teacher admissions process at a university in the southeastern United States were asked to rank the characteristics of their best teacher and their worst teacher in grades K-12. They most frequently reported that personal relationships formed between teacher and students greatly influenced the effectiveness of the teacher. The second most frequently reported characteristic was the provision of an appropriate classroom climate. The third most frequently mentioned characteristic, effective and ineffective teaching, was related to the expectations that teachers held for their students. It would seem that these data suggest a need for teacher preparation programs to provide information and instruction that will develop positive human relations and communications skills in preservice teachers along with classroom management and discipline strategies. (JD)

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LISTENING TO STUDENTS TO PROVIDE A PROMISING FUTURE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

Educational researchers have labored for over 50 years to determine those attributes of teachers that make them more or less effective. As Medley (1977) concludes, until recently these labors have not been very productive. Researchers have focused on teaching strategies used, frequency of use of selected teacher behaviors, even the teacher as a person. With all of these data at their disposal, researchers do not have sufficient information to construct a model for preparing only effective teachers. The purpose of this study is to examine effective and ineffective teacher characteristics from the perspective of aspiring teachers.

Related Literature

The literature suggests that since the 1920s beginning with the work of Arvil S. Barr, educational researchers have attempted to objectively ascertain what characteristics exist that might help educators determine teaching that is effective and teaching that is ineffective. Previous authors regularly and erroneously wrote that effective teachers are "good" teachers and that ineffective teachers are "bad" teachers.

In a study reported by Leeds (1954) fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students were asked to respond to an inventory through which they were to evaluate their teachers. Two prompts to which they were asked to respond are important to this paper. The open ended statements were: (1) Why I like this teacher; and (2) Why I don't like this teacher. The data from this study indicate that the students frequently mentioned the importance of the affective environments established by the teachers.

In a similar study, Farmer and Dravecky (1971) discuss the kinds of teachers they refer to as "turned on" or "with-it". In their study, 45 educational administrators and 52 classroom teachers in five western states stressed personal characteristics and interpersonal abilities as being important attributes of "turned on" or "with-it" teachers.

In other research, however, personal characteristics are not the sole criterion used for determining effective and ineffective teachers. There is support for analyzing the teacher's language in making such determinations. Gregory and Casteel (1976) describe the teacher's "conditional language" as having an effect on students' abilities to think logically. Weinstein and Middlestadt (1979) found through students' ratings of teachers that teacher behaviors and the quality of their questions affect student performance and learning. An examination of the data from 336 pre-service teachers revealed that subject matter knowledge as well as teacher concern for students were considered important in assessing the

effectiveness of teachers (Strickland, 1986). Pierce (1966), in examining the characteristics of adult basic educators considered to be effective, found a number of characteristics. He identified them as having to do with understanding, flexibility, patience, humor, practicality, creativity and preparation.

This is a limited survey of selected literature, and to generalize from these data becomes risky. However, it would seem that research related to teacher effectiveness reveals that students at various educational levels find a variety of characteristics important as they evaluate their teachers. But a careful examination of these data appears to indicate that those who teach effectively exhibit positive personal characteristics in combination with being knowledgeable and competent in presenting their subject.

The Study

During the 1988-1989 school year, 358 aspiring teachers at a state university in the southeastern United States were asked to complete a survey consisting of two open-ended questions. (See Appendix A). They were asked to describe their "best" K-12 teacher by listing the five characteristics that were seen as indicators of that person being their best teacher. They were also asked to describe their "worst" K-12 teacher by listing five characteristics that were seen as indicators of that person being their worst

teacher. Their answers to these questions were used as a basis for discussion as part of the interview process.

The respondents were categorized into three groups based upon their stated level of interest in teacher education: (1) K-4 (Early Elementary Grades); (2) 5-8 (Middle Grades); and (3) 9-12 (Secondary Grades). A random sample of teacher admissions candidates were chosen for this study -- 30 Early Elementary Grades candidates, 30 Middle Grades candidates, and 30 Secondary Grades candidates.

An examination of the data revealed almost no identical statements among the positive characteristics. This was also true for the negative characteristics. There was a total of 473 positive characteristic statements and a total of 465 negative characteristic statements.

After initial examination the characteristics of teachers as provided by prospective teachers were categorized under ten broad areas of teacher behavior: (1) personal relationships included those behaviors that indicated teacher warmth, an apparent interest of the teacher in his/her job and in children; (2) classroom atmosphere served as the umbrella for those statements that described attractiveness and educational climate; the aura of the room as a nice place to be; (3) moral character statements included honesty, integrity and community acceptance; (4) motivation/expectations were related to high standards established for and praise of the students; (5) lesson development/presentation

related to the ability of the teacher to provide/elicit clearly the information related to the lesson components; (6) management/discipline/time on task descriptors were typified by withitness, being kept busy at meaningful activities and fairness in discipline; (7) instructional activities were described as fun, interesting and practical; (8) knowledge of subject content was correlated by the respondents with intelligence and knowledge; (9) teacher planning was perceived as flexibility and preparedness; and (10) student evaluation related primarily to fair tests. These 10 descriptors were consolidated by grouping them into three categories describing the teacher as the: (1) person; (2) presenter; and (3) planner. Statements that did not fit these descriptors were listed in a category called "Other".

It was decided to examine the data in light of the certification goals of the respondents. Thus, positive responses of Early Elementary Grades certification candidates were grouped. The same grouping procedure was followed for Middle Grades and for Secondary Grades certification candidates. The procedure was then duplicated for the negative responses from candidates in each of those certification categories (See Tables 1 and 2).

POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS MOST FREQUENTLY SELECTED BY THE RESPONDENTS

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF RESPONSES BY CERTIFICATION GOAL

	K-4		5-8		9-12		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
THE PERSON								
Personal Relationships	39	24.68	44	28.03	50	31.65	133	28.12
Classroom Atmosphere/ Climate	37	23.42	19	12.10	15	9.49	71	15.01
Moral Character	2	1.27	0	0	0	0	2	.43
Sub Total	78	49.37	63	40.13	65	41.14	206	43.56
THE PRESENTER								
Motivation/ Expectations	16	10.13	25	15.92	22	13.92	63	13.32
Lesson Development/ Presentation	13	8.22	15	9.56	21	13.29	49	10.36
Management/Discipline/ Time-On-Task	9	5.70	16	10.19	9	5.70	34	7.19
Sub Total	38	24.05	56	35.67	52	32.91	146	30.87
THE PLANNER								
Instructional Activities Provided	24	15.19	16	10.19	19	12.03	59	12.47
Knowledge of Subject Content	4	2.53	11	7.01	12	7.59	27	5.71
Teacher Planning	2	1.27	4	2.55	8	5.06	14	2.96
Student Evaluation	5	3.16	2	1.27	2	1.27	9	1.90
Sub Total	35	22.15	33	21.02	41	25.95	109	23.03
Other	7	4.43	5	3.18	0	0	12	2.54
GRAND TOTALS	158	100.0	157	100.0	158	100.0	473	100.0

TABLE 2

NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS MOST FREQUENTLY SELECTED BY THE RESPONDENTS

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF RESPONSES BY CERTIFICATION GOAL

	K-4		5-8		9-12		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
THE PERSON								
Personal Relationships	55	35.71	35	23.18	36	22.50	126	27.10
Classroom Atmosphere/ Climate	14	9.09	23	15.23	19	11.88	56	12.04
Moral Character	0	0	2	1.32	2	1.25	4	4.86
Sub Total	69	44.80	60	39.73	57	35.63	186	40.00
THE PRESENTER								
Motivation/ Expectations	16	10.39	25	16.56	22	13.75	63	13.55
Lesson Development/ Presentation	18	11.69	16	10.60	25	15.62	59	12.69
Management/Discipline/ Time-On-Task	20	12.99	30	19.86	19	11.88	69	14.84
Sub Total	54	35.07	71	47.02	66	41.25	191	41.08
THE PLANNER								
Instructional Activities Provided	3	1.95	4	2.65	11	6.87	18	3.87
Knowledge of Subject Content	2	1.30	3	1.99	7	4.38	12	2.58
Teacher Planning	12	7.79	4	2.65	11	6.87	27	5.80
Student Evaluation	9	5.84	3	1.99	5	3.13	17	3.66
Sub Total	26	16.88	14	9.28	34	21.25	74	15.91
Other	5	3.25	6	3.97	3	1.87	14	3.01
GRAND TOTALS	154	100.0	151	100.0	160	100.0	465	100.0

Selected Findings

A number of results were revealed in this study. The most pertinent findings are listed below.

1. Characteristics that classified their "best" teacher in terms of personal qualities were described by 43.56% of the respondents.
2. Characteristics that classified their "worst" teacher in terms of personal qualities were described by 40.0% of the respondents.
3. For 23.03% of the respondents, planning was indicated as of least importance in determining if a teacher were a "best" teacher.
4. For 15.91% of the respondents, planning was indicated as of least importance in determining if a teacher were a "worst" teacher.
5. Only 24.05% of the respondents seeking Early Elementary Grades certification described the positive qualities of the teacher as a presenter.
6. Middle Grades certification responses related to the teacher as a presenter as descriptors of "worst" teachers were listed 47.02% of the time.
7. Secondary Grades certification responses related to the teacher as a planner as descriptors of "worst" teachers were listed 21.25% of the time.

8. With the exception of characteristics related to instructional activities and to management/discipline/time-on-task, the same characteristics that were seen as being of importance in determining if teachers were BEST teachers were also seen as being of importance in determining if teachers were WORST teachers (See Table 1 and Table 2).
9. From the totals of all subjects, those teachers most frequently considered "best teachers" were in the high school areas of English, Mathematics, and Social Studies (12 each -- See Table 3).
10. From the totals of all subjects, those teachers most frequently considered "worst teachers" were in high school science (14), seventh grade (12), sixth grade (10), and high school English (10).
11. The K-4 respondents selected the third grade teachers most frequently as the "best teacher" (6) and the sixth grade teacher as the "worst teacher" (5).
12. The 5-8 respondents most frequently selected the high school social studies teacher as the "best teacher" (5) and considered the "worst teacher" as those from the seventh and eighth grades (6 each).
13. The 9-12 respondents selected high school teachers in the content areas of English, mathematics, social studies equally as being the "best teacher" (5 each), but also selected mathematics and English teachers as the "worst

teacher" (5 each). They considered high school science teachers most frequently as the "worst teacher" (7).

14. Prospective K-4 teachers picked elementary teachers as their "best teacher" 11 times, picked middle grades teachers eight times, and picked high school teachers 11 times.
15. Prospective 5-8 teachers picked middle grades teachers as their "best teacher" nine times, but picked high school teachers 21 times. They did not pick elementary teachers as their "best teacher" at all.
16. Prospective 9-12 teachers picked high school teachers as their "best teacher" 26 times. However, they also picked high school teachers as their "worst teacher" 26 times.
17. The total of the groups selected females as their "best teacher" 76.7% of the time; males were selected "best teacher" 23.3% of the time. Females were selected as the "worst teacher" 51.1% of the time and males were selected as "worst teacher" 48.9% of the time.

TABLE 3

FREQUENCY OF "BEST TEACHER" AND "WORST TEACHER" BY CERTIFICATION AREA OF RATERS*

	K-4		5-8		9-12		TOTAL	
	B	W	B	W	B	W	B	W
Kindergarten	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
First Grade	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	3
Second Grade	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Third Grade	6	2	0	0	0	6	6	3
Fourth Grade	2	2	0	2	0	0	2	4
Fifth Grade	3	1	2	0	1	0	6	1
Sixth Grade	2	5	0	4	0	1	2	10
Seventh Grade	3	4	4	6	1	2	8	12
Eighth Grade	0	1	3	6	1	0	4	7
Art, Music	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Biology, Chemistry, Science	0	3	4	4	2	7	6	14
Business, Typing	0	0	1	1	3	1	4	2
English, Journalism, Communication	3	3	4	2	5	5	12	10
Foreign Language	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Health, Physical Education	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
History, Government, Social Studies	2	0	5	1	5	4	12	5
Home Economics	0	0	2	0	1	0	3	0
Mathematics	4	2	3	1	5	5	12	8
Unidentified High School	2	3	2	1	4	2	8	6

*B = Best Teacher; W = Worst Teacher

Discussion

Aspiring teachers have provided us with many clearly defined characteristics that they feel are representative of effective and ineffective teaching. They most frequently reported that the personal relationships that are formulated between the teacher and the students greatly influence the effectiveness of the teacher. One must infer that these respondents relate effective teaching to the degree to which the student perceives the teacher as a friendly, caring individual. The fact that these were described so frequently indicates that one component of the teacher preparatory program should be directed toward the affective domain. Apparently this component has been either omitted from previous teacher preparatory programs or was not adequately emphasized. In either case, serious consideration should be given to the development of in-class and field experiences geared to the enhancement of teacher-student relationships.

The second most frequently reported characteristic was the provision of an appropriate classroom climate. Most aspiring early elementary teachers indicated that a positive learning environment developed by the teacher was a characteristic of effective teaching. In contrast, aspiring middle grades and high school teachers were more likely to notice a negative atmosphere than a positive one. One may assume from these data that the personalities and levels of development of individuals entering

the three levels of teacher education may dictate differing perceptions of effective teaching. Prospective K-4 teachers may by nature need a warm, friendly environment, whereas the middle grades and high school prospects may learn effectively in a less friendly but still efficient learning climate. It may be only when that environment becomes inefficient or when the atmosphere provided by the teacher becomes too far removed from a warm and friendly atmosphere that these individuals are influenced by the climate of the classroom. The data indicate that the preparation of teachers must include experience in providing an appropriate learning environment for the students.

The third most frequently mentioned characteristic of effective and ineffective teaching related to the expectations the teacher held for their students. Positive and negative teacher expectations were more frequently mentioned by the aspiring middle grades teachers than by prospective teachers at either of the other certification levels. Also, expectations were mentioned least frequently by the early grades respondents. These data may indicate either that the K-4 student is not cognizant of what the students at that level are expected to learn or that they find all learning fun without the direct involvement of the teacher. In contrast, the middle grades students have reached the level of maturity that demands more direct teacher guidance. Likewise, students at the 9-12 certification level responded to this characteristic at nearly the same level as the middle grades

aspirant, indicating that they too may need to have guidance from the teacher to be motivated to learn.

If one listens to aspiring teachers for guidance in improving their pre-service preparation, certain additional components of current teacher preparatory programs should also be considered. Teacher preparation programs should provide information and instruction that will develop positive human relations and communications skills in pre-service teachers. They should also assist pre-service teachers to develop appropriate c l a s s r o o m management and discipline strategies. Further study should be given to the provision of experiences that will prepare pre-service teachers to appropriately motivate the child. Finally, these data suggest a need to re-examine teacher effectiveness research to determine the "best way" of lesson presentation.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS

YOUR NAME_____ DATE_____SEX_____

CHECK THE AREA THAT APPLIES TO YOUR PROGRAM OF STUDIES:

____LBD
____TMH
____Speech & Comm Disorders
____Library
____Other (specify)_____

____Elementary K-4
____Middle Grades 5-6
____Secondary_____

Remember the person you consider to have been your best teacher in grades kindergarten through 12. List five or more things about that teacher that made him/her "the **BEST**". After you have made your list, please rank these statements in order of significance by numbering them from 1 through 5 (with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest).

His/her grade level or subject taught_____

Male or female?_____

NOW, remember the person you consider to have been your worst teacher in grades kindergarten through 12. List five or more things about that teacher that made him/her "the WORST". After you have made your list, please rank these statements in order of significance by numbering them from 1 through 5 (with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest).

His/her grade level or subject taught_____

Male or female?_____

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